

Statement from Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA), a senior Member of the House
Select Committee on Homeland Security on Department of Homeland
Security Secretary Ridge raising the national terrorist threat level to orange
from yellow:

"Today Secretary Ridge called on all Americans to prepare to implement their emergency plan, and if they didn't have one, to make one, because the terrorist threat level is higher now than it has been since September 11th. This advice, while necessary, dramatically underlines the mismatch between where we are spending American treasure and lives compared to where we expect to be attacked.

"Iraqis undoubtedly feel safer today because Saddam has been captured, but Americans would like most of all to see the capture of Osama bin Laden and his top lieutenants. These are the enemies in the war on terror who are having a direct effect on the security of our families. Nevertheless, we are daily pouring the bounty of American wealth and the sacrifice of hundreds of young American lives into the Tigris and the Euphrates while significantly underfunding the mission of protecting the Hudson, the Potomac, and the Mississippi.

"The best example is that the Administration refuses to order that all commercial cargo placed on passenger planes be physically screened, just like luggage. With Al Qaeda repeatedly suggesting that it intends to target our airplanes, the American people demand that security at our most vulnerable targets such as airports should always be at the highest levels. Nevertheless, the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) routine is not to screen cargo on any planes. Governor Kean, the Chairman of the 9/11 investigation commission, recently suggested that the events of 9/11 could have been prevented. Yet the Bush Administration, inexplicably and, in my view, recklessly, continues to routinely allow unscreened and unknown cargo onto passenger planes during the holiday season or at any other time of year.

"Any one of those cargo packages could be a bomb, yet they are waived onto passenger planes without so much as a boarding pass. This is clearly unacceptable and reckless in this day and age, regardless of today's particular threat level."